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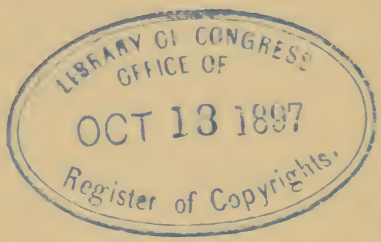
VERSE VAGARIES

GEORGE AUSTIN WOODWARD



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QUANDERY.

WHAT hath the end in store for thee,
O fragile bark on life's vast sea?

Hath pallid fate thy course marked out,
E'en now, beyond the pale of doubt?

Or is it in thy pow'r to say
What thou wilt do, and go thy way?

Whate'er thy trend, still shall it be
Enshrouded in deep mystery?

THERE is a law for every circumstance ;
Each hath its place, and none can interfere,
By virtue of decree which rules them all.
That which we call fate, hath bearing only
On what is past: the deity knows not
Each minute whim that wanton destiny
Will manifest before the die is cast.

REQUITAL.

THOUGH latent, there exists omnipotent,
A secret tribunal which meeteth out
In certainty and equity, though slow,
The compensations of preceding days.
All things adjust themselves; naught can escape:
Time levels all and renders for the best.

ODE TO A MARINER.

I.

SLEEP, O mariner brave,
Deep in thy ocean grave.
There is nothing can daunt thee there,
Save in thy coral sepulchre.

II.

Rest, O mariner, rest,
Calm and unbroken—blest!
Forever stilled, thy hopes, thy fears;
Alike to thee both smiles and tears.

III.

Peace, O mariner, peace,
That knoweth not surcease.
Oblivion o'er thee doth reign:
Thou canst not suffer any pain.

FEAR thou no phantom whatsoe'r:
Perspective oft lends magnitude;
And any coming ill doth melt
In face of stern reality.
There is no state, however drear,
But there's sure lethe instilled to quell
And deaden apprehended pain.

SAY you delusion is allied
To madness only? Then are all
Men mad in various degrees;
Fools in the solemn court of fate,
Whose massive walls reverberate
With mockery to their vain pleas:
Anon merciful death doth call;—
Humanity to rest is hied.

ECHOES FROM EMERSON.

BE thou as the wayside flower,
Which heeds but the passing hour;
Soothed alike in each moment,
Welcoming as Heaven-sent,
Sunshine or shower.

LET each step thou takest, find thee
Careful as 'twere thy mortal last.
The vast stretch of eternity
Is but the sum of trifles—past;
And thine every joy or pain
Is molded as thy life has been.

EVANESCENCE.

THOUGH thine environment seem fixed,
Know that at best, it soon must shift.
Oft mighty storms are heralded
By placid sea, and greater look
By contrast with tranquillity.

SEEK not an anchorage on time's drear waste ;
Thou canst not stay—thy ropes will turn to sand.
Onward and up—there is no rest for thee
Save in transition,—trust it to the end.
The song of life is continuity :
Drift outward and away, for God knows best.

PEER not into the mist of distant days ;
Or plan results of feeble years to come :
For million unseen forces cope the while,
And calculation ever falls amiss.
Attainment daunts the laggard wing of time ;
And oft in seeming idleness thou'lt reap
Gain such as thou hadst never reckoned on.

TO APOLLO.

GO, go thy way, and let poor Daphne rest ;
She loves thee not,—her love is yet to be ;
And silent sleeps, unknown e'en to herself.
Be its awakening near by, or far,
It will not be for thee,—oh, go thy way!

SOUL FLASHES.

LIKE ghosts we drift along our earthly course;
Strangers to ourselves,—unknown to others,
Save in rare moments when some kindred soul
Looks in our eyes: it is enough to know
That we are understood—can comprehend.

LOVE'S VOW.

OH dearest heart, words cannot give
The import of my love for thee :
It cannot fade while I shall live ;
Its watchword is eternity.

Oh dearest heart, I love you so !
Let patient years of sturdy deeds
Attest my words ; for time will show
Our garden fair, bereft of weeds.

FIDELITY.

I will be true to thee—it could not but be so—
Through all the hours—years ! that lapse unto the end.
Though fate might intervene — divide — naught could estrange ;
The night of earthly life would bring you back again.

FAITH.

I know whate'er thou doest, will be done,
Because thy reason says 'tis better so:
No act of thine could shake my faith in thee,—
Rather thou'd suffer untold pain thyself,
Than cast harm willfully on any one.
And if, perchance, an act of thine should bring
Aught of dread ill into some other life,
I'd know 'twere indirect—that 'twere not thou
Who made it so, but rather cruel chance.

AFFINITY.

EACH felt by intuitive thrill,
The blending of one common will.
A glance exchanged—then over all,
Darkness and silence spread their pall!
Oh may that somewhere in the sweet
To be, our kindred souls shall meet;
And hand-in-hand, together wend
A journey upward, without end.

ALONE.

SHE was so good, so pure,
Came radiant angels,
Gently her soul to lure
By their celestial spells.

Unrest pervades the earth !
I hear no more the song
Of birds, for all is dearth.
Alone!—Oh God, how long ?

TO ONE DEPARTED.

WHY should I weep for thee
Whose semblance rests in death?
Time soon will bring to me
The last of mortal breath.

And then aloft will soar
The captive soul,—released!
Where pain shall be no more;
Tumult forever ceased.

I think of thee in peace,
Mid silent stars above,
Where sorrow finds surcease,
And all is light and love.

So may I ever try
Like thee, all pure, to be:
That we may dwell on high
In immortality.

FALSE PRAISE.

(St. Peter to a Novice.)

"AND you would see Saint———?
You seek a myth, for he
Who once was known as such,
Makes his abode in Hell:
And though on earth they laud
Him saint, it is because
They know not how he sinned.
Their soft veneer of praise
Is naught to him; and wastes
Like gentle, summer rain
Fallen in some crater."

IN such degree as thought reverts from self,
Is cankerous anxiety swift merged
Into oblivion, by present joy.

Success is not thy purse run o'er with gold,
Nor is it gauged by mere acclaim of men.
Who still achieves, despite adversity,
Holds sway o'er self, hath title to the name.

BENEATH the barren snow
Flowers oft lie concealed.
Clouds do but rift, and lo,
Heaven's blue is revealed !

THERE'S naught so ruthless as the human tongue,
Which seldom knows truly whereof it speaks:
Though any utter ill of thee, veer not,
Nor heed, than thou would'st idle, barking curs.

'TIS oftener than not, with our own hands
We rear the prison, forge the very gyves
That hold us seeming prey to circumstance,
Forgetting he only shall win who strives.

PAST wrong is past—no longer is of thee;
Is best forgot in heat of present strife.
'Tis what thou *art*, not what thou seem'st to be,
That bringeth pain, imparteth joy, to life.

WISHES.

WOULD I were thee, sweet flower,
Free from the weight of care;
Safe in thy tiny bower,
Scenting the desert air.

Would I were thee, gay March wind,
That knoweth naught of fear.
On, on I would speed to find
A balm for ev'ry tear.

Would I, a gentle snowflake,
Might sail adown the sky,—
Only to melt and betake
My course again on high.

TO AN OLD YEAR.

THY course is almost run, old year, and soon
We too must pass into the great beyond.
The cold, pale stars are weeping tears of snow;
And night winds sadly moan thy requiem.
Be this our wish, whatever else befall:
That we as inviolate may become
As are the gentle snowflakes, purged above.

FAME.

TO write thy name on sand, or carve in rock—
In centuries to come, what matters it?
Both fade away and leave no trace, while thou
Must live, immortal index of thy past.

BUBBLES.

VAST string of relative degrees,
The universe takes cognizance
Of no finite supremacy.
Mere jejune babes, we weakly deck
Nonentity with tinsel gay,
And deem it great, deluding self;
Cold, tome-bound sapience sits high,
With fragments blindly struggling:
While calmly smiles the infinite
At brazen volatility.

HISTORY.

FOREST, field and mart—then desert waste ;
Life extinct, and mortal man effaced.

POSTERITY.

AFAR, in distant time to be,
A phantom populace, unborn,
Will live and struggle, e'en as we, —
Then perish, and forget to scorn.

BENEDICTION.

EARTH'S evening is nigh,—all ill forgot;
I close my eyes, at peace with all the world.
I wish but well, oh ye who knew me not—
Could never understand, and oft have hurled
Reproach or slander, peaceful be your lot.

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